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SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER AND AMBASSADOR DISCUSS ECONOMIC AND SECURITY RELATIONS

REF: MANAMA 0504

Classified By: Ambassador William T. Monroe for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

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¶11. (C) Prime Minister Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa told the Ambassador June 3 that he had been pleased to meet with the delegation from the U.S.-Bahrain Business Council (USBBC) on May 29 (reftel). He said it was important for visitors from the United States to meet with senior Bahraini leaders. "If they don't talk to us, they could have the wrong impression of Bahrain," he said. (Note: His mention of the "wrong impression" could have been a reference to a CNN news item that ran June 1 reporting on poverty and sectarian tensions in Bahrain. The CNN program generated some angry editorial comment in two pro-government papers for its alleged focus on the negative side of Bahrain.) The Ambassador replied that the USBBC visit had been the first trade mission to Bahrain since the signing of the U.S.-Bahrain Free Trade Agreement, and that members of the delegation had developed leads and contacts. He noted that bilateral trade had increased 50% in 2006, and it was up another 50% in the first three months of this year compared with the same period a year earlier.

¶12. (C) The PM lamented the security situation in Lebanon, rhetorically asking, "Where did Fatah Al Islam come from?" He thanked the United States for standing by and supporting the Lebanese government and PM Siniora, and commented that U.S.-Bahraini security relations were strong. The Ambassador noted that our two governments would soon sign an MOU covering security cooperation. The PM said Bahrain could learn a lot from the U.S. in the security area, particularly on surveillance and security management and administration.

¶13. (C) The PM said the Cabinet earlier that day had discussed inflation and government subsidies. He emphasized the importance of the local press getting the story right. In response to the Ambassador's question, the PM agreed that the Bahraini government could improve its press relations by appointing a spokesperson, but it would have to be the right individual. He is not happy with what is covered in the press, which he said ignores achievements and plans for the future and instead focuses on the negative.

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